

‘We are Lutherans from Germany’: Music, language, social history and change in Hopevale

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You know, to me, we have lost that pride in ourselves ... who we are. We’re Lutherans from Germany. We have to sing all English ... [correcting himself] no German songs. We have no more pride in ourselves.

Praise God in our Language! This very moment, throughout the world, every nation, country, thank God for the Saviour in their Language. Why not we?

I think it would be good if we could revive that, especially at times like this, when there’s joy in our hearts, to know that we have a Saviour. Why not thank him from our hearts...

I think we Aborigines of today need to look at ourselves, and try and find out who we are. We seem to copy white man everywhere. We’re just like copy cats. We want to act like them and get drunk and sit in the pub on high stools and cause ourselves suffering and pain, and that’s not the way to go...

[Sings ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing’ in Guugu Yimithirr]¹

The excerpt is a transcription of fieldwork footage filmed during the Carols by Candlelight festivities in December 2004 in the Lutheran Australian Aboriginal community of Hopevale, Northern Queensland. It documents the speech given by local Indigenous Pastor George Rosendale in which he reflected on the Lutheran heritage of the former Northern Queensland Hopevale Mission.² He urged local Indigenous people to seek support in their Lutheran religious heritage of three generations suggesting it might encourage them to reflect on the level of alcohol misuse in the community and alter their ways. He stated that the excessive drinking habits of many local Indigenous people is a negative way in which they seek to imitate white Anglo-Australian culture. As an alternative, Pastor Rosendale advocated that not only should Hopevalians seek support in

1 Rosendale, George, 19 December 2004, speech Christmas Carols by Candlelight, Hopevale.

2 Hopevale is sometimes spelt as Hope Vale and known throughout history by different names depending on the location of the main township: Elim, Cape Bedford, Spring Hill and now Hopevale or Hope Vale. The location of the main township changed as cyclones and heavy rains often destroyed the main settlement, causing Hopevalians to move.

their Lutheran faith, but that they should also consider Indigenising it through re-introducing the practice of singing Christian songs in their local Indigenous language Guugu Yimithirr, as opposed to English. He also referred to the German heritage of the Lutheran faith and suggests that the loss of faith and the increasing loss of language competency in Guugu Yimithirr amongst the local population are causing a loss of pride. This is because, Pastor Rosendale believes, the singing of hymns in the local language is more meaningful and speaks to the heart as people are better able to understand how they are worshipping.

Pastor Rosendale's speech is an interesting one as it not only demonstrates how the local community have made Lutheranism their own, but also how Pastor Rosendale no longer views the Christian identity and the singing of Christian hymns as being imposed, non-Indigenous and 'foreign'. Whereas the faith introduced by German Lutheran missionaries has been accepted, the consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol is still viewed as being a non-Indigenous activity which conflicts with an Indigenous identity, especially a Christian Indigenous identity. The speech raises interesting questions as to how Hopevalian identity has been shaped through history, place and song and how musical and spiritual practices are constantly changing in response to the local circumstances and musical globalisation.

In this article I will firstly examine what was known of local non-Christian musical practices prior to missionisation to contextualise the reasons why Hopevalians have chosen to adopt the Lutheran hymn tradition so thoroughly in comparison to other Indigenous missions. My aim is to describe a local history, as opposed to looking at the processes of missionisation more generally across Australia. The latter has already successfully been done elsewhere.³ Neither do I intend to offer a comparative outlook in this article other than to indicate that the Hopevalian context is quite different to that of other Indigenous communities both historically and socially. Magowan, Grau and McDonald have worked with other Indigenous communities documenting their Christian musical practices.⁴ In Hopevale, missionary intervention succeeded in all but obliterating local, pre-colonial ceremonial, musical and spiritual practices.⁵ The things that remained were the local language, oral mission history, hunting techniques, and a knowledge and love of Country. Hopevalian scholar and politician Noel Pearson pointed out in 1986 that whilst painting, song and dance do have their place in Hopevalian culture, they exist as 'curios', and will remain so until the local community affords them cultural and religious significance.⁶

This situation contrasts significantly with for example Magowan's social context on Galiwin'ku in Arnhem Land with the Yolngu, where pre-colonial traditions have absorbed and adapted Christianity to suit local spiritual understandings of the Christian Gospel. In Arnhem Land community members are still able

3 See for example Harris 1994; Swain and Rose 1988.

4 Magowan 2007, 2001, 1999; Grau 2001; McDonald 2001.

5 See for example Pearson 1986: 8, 24; Jack, Walter, Interviewer David Woodgate, 2000, *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* [Oral History]; Hope Vale, 2000: interview 26 October.

6 Pearson 1986: 8.

to compose and perform using song and dance styles derived and developed from pre-colonial practices. This is not the case in Hopevale, although as I shall demonstrate, Hopevalians are currently shaping their own interpretations of what it means to be a Christian Indigenous person through song, using their uniquely local identity based on mission history, family and Country. Unlike in Arnhem Land and other parts of the Northern Territory and Kimberley Hopevalians do not compose their own hymns either in English or in Guugu Yimithirr, the local language because their knowledge of non-Christian and non-Western musical forms is scant to non-existent. The process of Indigenisation after a very conservative Lutheran approach to worship is slow, relatively new and therefore specific examples of Indigenisation are rare and few. It must also be added that this article is itself a historical document to a fashion. Due to lack of funding I have been unable to return to Hopevale for a long enough period to thoroughly explore how things have changed and thus this scholarly contribution should be contextualised in that it reflects for the most part what I observed between September 2004 and June 2005 combined with a brief visit in 2009 and might not incorporate the changes that have occurred since.⁷

After examining what was known of local non-Christian musical practices prior to missionisation, I will show how Aboriginal Lutherans in the community of Hopevale have historically constructed, performed and negotiated their Indigenous identities through Lutheran hymnody and how this is gradually changing due to global influences from the music industry, changes in linguistic practices and a slow move towards the Indigenisation of musical practices. Here again I aim to offer a local perspective, which has been informed by earlier discussions on the constructions of Indigenous identities in Australia more generally.⁸ This contextualised discussion will include an analysis of the relationship between geographical location, or 'Country', Aboriginal spirituality and music. I will show how Hopevalian musicians have begun to quote hymnody in self-composed Country and Western song styles, using the English language. These new songs refer to the local spirituality, geographical areas, people (both alive and deceased) and a shared social history. I will argue here that this emerging musical trend can be viewed as one way in which Hopevalian spirituality and musical styles are 'Indigenising' whilst 'globalising and modernising' after many years of conservative, Lutheran musical and spiritual worship. This Indigenisation takes place, I argue, through the performance of Aboriginal concepts of Country and shared oral (contemporary) history in songs. I will suggest this approach to musical performance may be one way in which Hopevalians are reconciling their localised mission history with their modern identities as Aboriginal Christians.

7 I spent one year facilitating the local Hopevale Community Choir during an applied ethnomusicological project for my PhD. This project was by a reciprocal arrangement whereby the community asked me to revitalise and facilitate the local choir and in return assisted me with my field research.

8 See for example Beckett 1988; Langton 1981.

Non-Christian musical practices prior to missionisation

The Hopevale community is an old Lutheran mission settlement in Northern Queensland, Australia. In 1886 land was bought by Pastor Johannes Flierl for the purposes of creating a mission to Indigenous Australians of the Cooktown area and beyond. It was in response to the decimation and maltreatment of the local Indigenous population by settlers who arrived during the Palmer River Gold Rush and later exploited the pearling, fishing and cattle industries.⁹ The mission was initially administered by the Lutheran church of Neuendettelsau, Germany. In Hopevale's oral history, the figure of Pastor Georg Heinrich Schwarz (nicknamed *Muni* by local Indigenous mission residents) looms large. Although not the founding missionary, Schwarz presided over the mission's development between 1887 and 1942. Later the Lutheran Church of Australia took over management of the settlement and today it is the local, Indigenous Community Council and Church Councils that manage the former mission. During the period between 1887 and 1942 missionary Schwarz, with the help of his more musical colleague Pastor Poland (based on the mission between 1888 and 1909), translated sections of the Bible and hymns into the dominant local language Guugu Yimithirr. Congregational and later choral singing in Guugu Yimithirr became popular pastimes in the community. Hymns were taught and sung during school times, evening social gatherings and worship. Lutheran hymnody and harmonised congregational singing thus became local musical traditions. The importance of this local musical practice in shaping identities was increased by the number of Stolen Generation residents on the Hopevale Mission. Members of this generation are children of Aboriginal descent, who were removed from their Indigenous families during the protectionist eras of Australia's history. To these Stolen children, the Lutheran musical tradition and those of the European settlers were the only ones with which they were familiar.

In 2005 very little was known by Hopevalians about the musical history of the settlement and area prior to missionisation. Only one older resident living on the mission in 2005 had a performative knowledge of older songs being sung on the mission that related to non-Christian themes.¹⁰ Historical sources do hold some clues as to what types of music may have been performed in the past. These sources, however, were written by the first northern protector Walter Edmund Roth¹¹ and local missionary Wilhelm Poland. The sources are not comprehensive and do not reflect Indigenous interpretations of the music being performed in

9 Local language and family groups included no less than 50 in the area (Pohlner 1986: 14). By 1986 the remaining kinship groups included: Dhanil Warra; Ngurrumungu Warra; Dingaal Warra; Gulaal Warra; Daarba Warra; Binhhi Warra; Ngaagdha Warra; Dhiidharr Warra; Buurnga Warra; Gambaar Warra; Dhuubi Warra; Nugal Warra; Gaamay Warra; and Nguymbarr Nguymbarr (Pohlner 1986: 182). Other family groups also lived in the area and were descendants from people of different areas not traditionally settled in the local vicinity. Their settlement occurred due to the removal of children to the mission from other areas.

10 I am grateful to uncle Lyndsay Nipper (now deceased) for sharing his songs with me during my fieldwork. The songs have now been placed in the Indigenous Knowledge Centre in Hopevale.

11 Walter Edmund Roth (2 April 1861 – 5 April 1933) was appointed the first Northern Protector of Aborigines in 1898 and was based in Cooktown, Queensland, near Cape Bedford. From 1904 to 1906 he was Chief Protector and part of his duties was to record Aboriginal cultures.

any way. It is also impossible to assess how accurate Roth and Poland's records are, given the current lack of non-Western, pre-colonial musical practices in Hopevale.

Roth writing in 1909 about an initiation ceremony at Cape Bedford (where the Hopevale township was then located, on the beach 30 km west of the current township) records that the dances were about animals and natural phenomena. These phenomena included the dances and song cycles of the broлга (or native companion as the bird was known in Roth's time), owl, pheasant, body louse, black palm, frog, an unidentified fresh water fish, mosquito, crab, honey, kangaroo, a dog running after a lizard, fresh-water mussel, stone fish, alligator, eel, and flying fox, closing with the snake dance.¹² All these animals, insects and water creatures are part of the local flora and fauna at Cape Bedford and therefore likely to have been totemic animals to the Aboriginal people living at Cape Bedford during Roth's visit. It is unclear, however, how much Roth and the missionaries understood about these songs and their significance. Roth accorded little spiritual significance to the initiation ceremonies and their dances, songs and art, writing that:

Beyond being commanded what not to eat, the novice here receives no instructions whatever concerning his sexual or social relationships, no moral or ethical precepts are incalculated, nor is any form of education (in ways of hunting, weapon-making, etc.) imparted; indeed, from what I learnt and saw, I should judge that his education, such as it is, is greatly misguided and retarded by attendance at the ceremony ... after every form of enquiry, direct and indirect, I was able to satisfy myself that throughout all these series of performances, not one has any ethical or educational significance - there is not indeed the slightest intention of pointing a moral to adorn a tale.¹³

Missionary Poland arrives at the same conclusion, writing:

From start to finish, the ceremony seemed to lack deeper significance. If deeper meanings had at one time existed, they had obviously been lost completely to the present generation. All our attempts to get to the bottom of what was really going on were in vain, even among the baptized Christians. The latter would certainly not have kept it from us if they had known.¹⁴

Roth draws this conclusion despite his observation that there was an 'essential portion of the ceremony' which the novices had explained to them.¹⁵ Similarly Poland writes that at the end of each presentation of dances during initiation ceremonies, the novices were given 'a whispered and most profuse explanation

12 Roth 1909: 172.

13 Roth 1909: 167.

14 Poland 1988: 96.

15 Roth 1909: 171.

of the meaning of the play [dance]'.¹⁶ Poland does not elaborate on what was whispered however, and Roth makes no further mention of the exact details of the information being passed on to the initiates. This might suggest they were not told and had not heard what was said and therefore had only a partial understanding of the knowledge being transferred.

The non-Christian songs which accompanied the dances also received little attention as no aesthetic or didactic merit could be perceived by Roth and the missionaries. With regards to the chorus of male singers, Roth writes 'the shouting is nearly all "au! au! au!", hardly any words being spoken, the whole performance being what we should almost call "dumb show"'.¹⁷ Poland too, attributes little merit to the traditional singing, referring to it as 'monotonous' or 'irritating'. In mortuary ceremonies the melodies sung were said to have been rendered as a 'monotonous falsetto singing' by the men. This singing was accompanied by 'ear shattering wailing' from the women.¹⁸

During the missionary period disrespect for elders was also cultivated through regular preaching by Poland and Schwarz who sought the help of young children to increase conversion rates. Poland recalls some of the preaching he did, writing:

You [Indigenous, Cape Bedford] children, I wish that you, too, would tell them about it [the Gospel]; you who have discovered something better since living with us! Tell your parents and relatives that they cannot go on as they are. Your chance of being believed may be greater than ours. Can you bear to see them [parents and relatives] continuing along the path which will, in turn, lead each of them to eternal destruction?¹⁹

With the decline of ceremonial customs and initiations, local Cape Bedford Aborigines came to church and adopted the Lutheran faith and with it, its hymnody. For younger children who had been raised on the mission or those who had not been initiated Christianity became a 'traditional' spirituality as it was the only religion they came to know well. Through preaching and hymnody missionaries sought to instil amongst their flock Christian moral values and spiritual beliefs. Hymnody and congregational singing played an important part in the formation of an Aboriginal Christian mission identity.

Consolidating a Lutheran, Hopevalian identity through song

Congregational and hymn singing played an important role in the processes of evangelisation at Cape Bedford and the formation of a Christian identity. Choruses and hymns were ways in which the Christian gospel was musically communicated to the Aborigines. Since the Guugu Yimithirr people did not

16 Poland 1988: 96.

17 Roth 1909: 172.

18 Poland 1988: 21, 38, 86.

19 Poland 1988: 108-109.

read or write when missionaries arrived, hymnody was a more effective mode of communication as the message was in a format which could be heard, learnt and orally transmitted through song. Pohlner writing about Hope Valley (near Cape Bedford) records:

Singing was traditionally an important means of communication. When Pastor Bartholomaeus came to Hope Valley in 1939 there was an elderly aborigine Toby, camped in the stable. He had come to the Mission as an old man. When the young pastor asked how he had come to know Jesus he replied, 'Through listening to the boys singing hymns every night.'²⁰

Hymnody also became more meaningful once missionaries Poland and Schwarz had grasped one of the local languages, Guugu Yimithirr and translated the hymns and Gospel. Historical records indicate that Hopevale residents enjoyed singing. Poland, comments that: 'Scarcely an evening goes by without the sound of open-air singing'.²¹

Hymnody was also used to counter local non-Christian beliefs and practices. Poland records several 'translations' of hymns into Guugu Yimithirr for the purposes of religious instruction, such as *Christus der ist mein Leben (Abide, O dearest Jesus)* and *Ringe recht, wenn Gottes Gnade*.²² The second hymn is based on a German chorale and was 'translated' by Poland to instruct the young boys who were ready to become *ngumbal*, initiated men, against the perceived evils of *ngancha*, their initiation ceremony.²³ According to Poland, missionary attempts at devaluing the initiation ceremonies at Cape Bedford were rewarded. He describes how young boys laughed at a community elder when he came to the mission to collect the boys ready to be initiated and asserts that the: 'Guugu Yimithirr tribe probably never celebrated another *ngancha*, apart from a small group, the younger generation had settled down with us for good'.²⁴

The role of hymnody at Cape Bedford was therefore to introduce the Gospel whilst devaluing traditional Aboriginal culture. Hymnody and congregational singing were also used to ridicule the elders who practised traditional initiation customs. The eventual loss of the initiation ceremonies had a negative impact on the ability of young men to identify with the culture of their ancestors and parents. The traditional initiation ceremonies had helped to impart genealogical, historical, geographical, biological as well as spiritual information. Their loss at Cape Bedford meant that the Aboriginal people were no longer able to form an understanding of their pre-Christian spirituality, social histories and identities through ceremony and song.

The Lutheran, specifically Hopevalian, identity was further consolidated when Hopevalians (then called the Cape Bedford people) were forcibly removed in

20 Pohlner 1986: 110-111.

21 Poland 1988: 85.

22 Poland 1988: 85, 99.

23 See, for example, Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2011.

24 Poland 1988: 99.

1942 to the Indigenous reservation, Woorabinda, during the Second World War. Woorabinda is an Aboriginal reserve now managed by an Aboriginal council. It is situated 2000 kilometres south of Cape Bedford, and south-west of the larger Queensland town of Rockhampton on Australia's East Coast. The climate at Woorabinda is substantially colder than that of tropical Cape Bedford. The people of the Cape Bedford Mission were taken there without warning on 17 May 1942. They were not given the option to oppose the move. The Cape Bedford travellers were offered very little food during the journey and many people were extremely cold because they did not have suitable clothes for the harsher climate resulting in many deaths due to influenza. At Townsville, 50 older people were taken to live on Palm Island Aboriginal reserve off the coast. The elders were the main guardians of oral communal history and their removal at Townsville, combined with the influenza and dengue fever epidemics that followed, led to a significant loss in the community's historical knowledge.

Hopevalian people today conceive of this 'evacuation' as an exile in bondage away from their Promised Land, their home in Northern Queensland.²⁵ It led to the further decimation of the Guugu Yimithirr people and resulted in a loss of oral, musical and spiritual knowledge. Hopevalian elder Eric Deeral records that a quarter of the population was lost within two weeks.²⁶ Local history recounts the evacuation and the hardships experienced through various media²⁷ and as I shall demonstrate later, through oral history and song.

In response to this adversity those still remaining formed a close-knit community in Woorabinda. Woorabinda's white overseers were less restrictive in their admission and protective policies for Aborigines in comparison to Cape Bedford's missionary Schwarz. As a result the Cape Bedford people were able to experience regular interaction with other institutionalised Aborigines for the first time. They could now compare their life at Cape Bedford with that in Woorabinda. One of the differences was that Woorabinda was spiritually diverse. In the 1940s Woorabinda counted no less than three Christian denominations: a Roman Catholic Church, a Church of England congregation and the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM). There had been the suggestion that the Cape Bedford congregation should join the Church of England on account of Mrs Schwarz's Anglican background. The Cape Bedford Indigenous elders, however, opted to maintain their Lutheran practices, rather than amalgamate with other churches. Pohlner states that 'the Cape Bedford Aborigines were not for experimenting. They suffered enough loss.'²⁸

Lutheran hymnody sung in Guugu Yimithirr, was instrumental in maintaining the community's denominational and Northern Aboriginal identity during its exile in Woorabinda. Pohlner records that '[g]lorious singing resounded through

25 Pearson 1986: 63.

26 Deeral undated: 6.

27 See, for example, mission newsletters written by George Bowen in Pohlner 1974: 6-7; a locally produced video documentary, Aboriginal Co-Ordinating Council Media Facility 2002; published history written by local people such as Deeral undated: 6-7.

28 Pohlner 1986: 114.

the Woorabinda settlement, not only on Sundays, but every morning and evening'²⁹ and visiting Lutheran Pastor Vic Wenke was of the opinion that '[i]t was most inspiring to hear the [Cape Bedford] natives sing. At times I was hardly able to hear the music of the organ'.³⁰ Singing also helped maintain Hopevalian morale and kept alive memories of their home in Northern Queensland:

June Pearson: Quite a lot of the old fellas they learnt to sing in the churches in Woorabinda, because they sang a lot to stay happy to come back home.³¹

This remembrance through Lutheran hymnody helped to sustain emotional and spiritual bonds with their geographical homes. This illustrates the fact that the performance of Christian hymnody, as translated directly from German hymnals using the German melodies, was able to give voice to spiritual bonds to a geographical area. The performances included sentiments of longing for, and a spiritual connection to, this same area.

It was also at Woorabinda that the Cape Bedford people received their first publication in Guugu Yimithirr: a book of worship which included 27 hymns, translated by Poland and Schwarz.³² Mrs Schwarz additionally sent out a set of 12 Sankey song books and a tune book.³³ It is likely that the frequent singing of the hymns in their own language heightened the people's sense of unity socially, linguistically, spiritually and musically. The rendition of the Lutheran hymns in Guugu Yimithirr contributed to the construction of a regional, Aboriginal Lutheran identity, which was compared and contrasted with that of the other residents from Woorabinda.

The different uses of language in Hopevalian hymnody

An important element in the Hopevale tradition of hymn singing which helped to define Cape Bedford identities during the evacuation was the use of the local language Guugu Yimithirr. At the time of my own research, the significance of Guugu Yimithirr was being contested. Perceptions about its appropriate use and meaningfulness are constantly evolving and differed between generations.

Pastor Rosendale, whose quote opened this article, not only advocated the use of Guugu Yimithirr in hymnody as opposed to English, but also suggested that the German pronunciation of certain words should be used:

George Rosendale: When we singing in Guugu Yimithirr *yurra* [You, plural, addressing his comment to Daisy Hamlot] shouldn't be saying 'Jesus' [pronounced in an English fashion].

29 Pohlner 1986: 114.

30 Pohlner 1986: 123.

31 Pearson, June interview with Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 29 November 2004, Hopevale.

32 Schwarz 1946.

33 Pohlner 1986: 121-123.

Daisy Hamlot: Yeah, yeah ... hmmm, Jesus [pronouncing it in a Germanic fashion].

GR: We, when we talk about, in Guugu Yimithirr, when we talk about Jesus [English pronunciation], we say it like the Germans, I think. Jesus [Germanic pronunciation]. Jesus ... Jesus, and I had a bit of an argument with what-his-name, because we wanted to spell it that way, Jesus [Germanic pronunciation], Y, I, S, U, S and eh-h, some of the oldies they didn't like it. But that's the way we ... and I always think that way. Like 'God' [English pronunciation], we don't pronounce it 'God' [English pronunciation] either. 'Gott' [Germanic pronunciation]. G, O, T.

Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg: Oh, so like the German, Gott.

GR: Well, in the Guugu Yimithirr, when the old people learnt, that's the way they learnt to use His name, 'Gott'.³⁴

From the above interview transcript it is clear that not all people agree with Pastor Rosendale's recommendations about the use of Guugu Yimithirr in worship and the Germanic pronunciation of certain words, even if they are part of the community's historical worship practices. This is not only due to an antipathy towards the Lutheran church, but also to the linguistic diversity of the Hopevale community, changes in the prevalence of the use of Guugu Yimithirr, personal linguistic preferences, and changes in the levels of literacy in the community. At the time of research most people preferred to use English and Guugu Yimithirr in song.

Historically speaking German was used very little on the mission. The Cape Bedford Mission became a place where Guugu Yimithirr and English were learnt and taught by the missionaries and mission Aborigines: Guugu Yimithirr to facilitate evangelisation and English to enable communication with the non-Indigenous settlers.³⁵ The use of Guugu Yimithirr provided an Indigenous alternative for Aborigines who had been removed from areas where Guugu Yimithirr was not originally spoken. It also unified those who already spoke it in their common need to preserve an integral element of their culture.

The use of a common language in daily life or song did not entirely consolidate the mission identity. Haviland writes:

It is only in grammars and linguists' imaginations that idealised speaker-hearers possess monolithic linguistic 'competence'; in practice principled variation or haphazard extemporising, and sometimes downright error, is the rule. Hopevale is an Aboriginal community where the

34 Rosendale, George interview with Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 23 March 2005, Hopevale.

35 Haviland and Haviland 1980: 129; Haviland 1985: 172.

traditional multiplicity of language varieties is overshadowed only by an even greater range of social variation in origins, biography, loyalty and circumstance among speakers.³⁶

Changes in the Cape Bedford people's literacy levels and further acquaintance with the settler community also required that English was learnt. Pohlner quotes a letter from Schwarz written in 1911 to the church inspector:

Sunday Services and the morning and evening devotions are always held in Koko Yimidhir [Guugu Yimithirr]. But the catechizing (teaching) is done in both languages [English and Guugu Yimithirr] and is better understood that way. There are many things which neither we nor the natives can adequately express in our language and we have to make long explanations which even then may not be quite clear. If this is the case even the natives prefer to use the English language. You, dear Inspector, do not seem to be happy about giving the English Bibles to the natives. Several years ago I would have agreed with you. For they had only limited use of the English Bible. But today it is quite different.³⁷

In recent times Aboriginal English has become more prevalent due to increasing access to mass media. Unlike in the former mission's past, Guugu Yimithirr is no longer taught in a structured fashion.³⁸ At the time of research most people I worked with spoke a combination of Guugu Yimithirr and Aboriginal English. When asked what language people preferred to use in song, answers varied. Many youngsters would say English was their language of choice, while some choir members suggested that to them both English and Guugu Yimithirr are equally meaningful when it came to singing hymns. These facts suggest that whilst Guugu Yimithirr is important, the English language has become incorporated to such an extent that it has become as meaningful as Guugu Yimithirr to some Hopevalians.

Interviews I conducted, however, also indicated that this opinion varied according to performance context and the level of knowledge a singer had of the Guugu Yimithirr language. Some translated hymns contained older Guugu Yimithirr words which singers did not know how to pronounce. They thus found it easier to sing these songs in English. Interviews also indicated that for public performances, some choir members liked singing in Guugu Yimithirr because it elicited appreciative comments from external audiences:

Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg: We should do a few Guugu ones, actually for the tour.

Daisy Hamlot: Because them people in Cooktown like us singing in Language [in Guugu Yimithirr].

36 Haviland 1985: 171.

37 Pohlner 1986: 58.

38 This, however, is changing. Hopevalians are developing their own teaching resources for the local primary school.

MSR: Well, you should do it more often. Remember what Pastor George said at the Carols by Candlelight?

DH: What he said now?

MSR: He said we need to sing in Guugu more. What do you think about that? Do you like singing in Guugu?

DH: Yeah ... I don't mind.

MSR: Do you prefer it to English? What's easier for you?

DH: I like it in English because, some words I don't know too, in Guugu you know.

MSR: The ones in the yellow book [Pastor Rosendale's translated hymns 1986]?

DH: Yeah.

MSR: Is it old Guugu, or too difficult?

DH: Yeah some words there I can't pronounce it properly see? Most of them I know, [but] the hard ones...

During the same interview Daisy also said:

DH: They [the predominantly white audience at the Carols by Candle Light ceremony] liked that 'Silent Night' we sang, in Guugu!...

MSR: So, on the whole, do you prefer singing in English, would you say?

DH: Yeah.³⁹

This particular discussion demonstrates that although there may be some community members such as Pastor George Rosendale who would advocate the use of the local language and a Germanic pronunciation of words in speech and song, not all members of the community are equally comfortable with this idea, Daisy Hamlot being one of them. She prefers singing many of her hymns in English. Nevertheless, Daisy was aware of the appeal that singing in Guugu Yimithirr had to external audiences and therefore felt the language should be used.

Auntie Daisy Hamlot's divided opinion is not unique. Auntie Myrtle Bambie also said that she had been complimented on her use of Guugu Yimithirr by audiences in Cooktown after having performed there for a Carols by Candlelight concert and a Tsunami fundraising event. She herself, however, equally enjoys singing in English and does not necessarily prefer singing in Guugu Yimithirr over singing in English.⁴⁰ Auntie Myrtle also commented that the use of Guugu Yimithirr was

³⁹ Hamlot, Daisy interview with Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 4 February 2005, Hopevale.

⁴⁰ Bambie, Myrtle interview with Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 1 March 2005, Hopevale.

decreasing and that her grandchildren could not always understand her when she used it to address them. This she thought, was disappointing and suggested the use of hymnody as a means of teaching the younger children the Guugu Yimithirr language. These findings show that singers actively construct their performative identities linguistically through deliberately choosing to sing in either Guugu Yimithirr or English depending on where they are singing and to whom.

During my fieldwork period, elders felt the younger generation in Hopevale was becoming less literate in comparison to those Hopevalians educated by mission staff of the past. New religious songs in Guugu Yimithirr were not being composed for worship purposes and only older translated Guugu Yimithirr hymns or English hymns performed. The breakdown of family units caused by social difficulties has contributed to the decline in the tradition of hymn-singing and music-making in family homes as well. Thus the transmission of the Guugu Yimithirr language through hymns and songs has declined. Youths often favour listening to, or performing, more popular music styles such as Country and Western, reggae, and hip hop. Most contemporary songs written by Hopevalians are in English or may use the odd Guugu Yimithirr word, but not much more. This suggests that the route to Indigenisation may not lead along the linguistic path alone but needs to incorporate various aspects of the local culture.

New compositions: Modernisation, globalisation and Indigenisation

Verse 1 'Take my people back home'

...
Hear my plea
I can see him on his knees
Please Lord,
Look at us
We had no choice
But to leave our home land
We are now in Your hands
Please take my people back home
Oh Lord take care of me

Refrain

Take my people back home
To the place where they were born
Their hearts are broken and torn
I can hear their spirits singing
Rock of ages
Cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee⁴¹

41 First verse of composition by Thea and Neville Bowen, 'Take My People Back Home', Transcript of field recording, 3 March 2005.

The lyrics to the above song were composed by Neville and Thea Bowen. They describe a community elder praying to a Christian God for the community's release from exile in Woorabinda and the community's wish to go back home to Hopevale. The last three lines of the refrain also quote the hymn 'Rock of Ages', a community favourite. The musical style used by Thea and Neville is Country and Western with two voices harmonising diatonically. Harmonically and instrumentally, the song reflects the influences of Country and Western music in the community, which alongside hymnody, rap, hip hop and reggae now forms part of the local musical diet. This music is consumed through CDs, satellite television and to some extent radio in the local area where there is reception and demonstrates the effects of global mass culture on a local level. Hopevalians now also record themselves on a regular basis and CDs circulate the community.

The subject matter of 'Take my people back home' is localised too, for it refers to local people and a shared social history. This is similar to the subject matter of other songs by Indigenous Australian artists, who also refer to local geographical areas and shared histories and experiences in new popular music compositions. The link between geography, history, kin and song is not a new one and pervades Indigenous Australian music-making.⁴² This is because Indigenous spirituality is inextricably linked to geography and a sense of place, or 'Country'. Local flora and fauna, as well as weather conditions and other natural phenomena are referred to in song, art, dance and story-telling. The performance of these art forms in the more 'traditionally orientated' communities such as those in the Northern Territory is said to promote the wellbeing of local Country and the persons living there. It is also through these art forms that local history, customs and Indigenous Law are transmitted. Consequently, references to Country in song, dance and art are tremendously important in the formation of Indigenous identities.

In the context of Hopevale, what is unique about Thea and Neville Bowen's composition, is that it is one of the first examples I encountered that incorporated a quote from a Christian hymn into the song's structure, or referred to the community's Lutheran and Anglican musical and spiritual heritage. In most other local compositions by, for example, the popular band *Black Image*, no such references to Christianity were found at the time of research. *Black Image* do, however, refer to their Country and people in their songs. The band members have Guugu Yalanji connections and their song 'This Land' on the album *Beautiful Land and Sea* pictures the Country of singer Damien Harrigan's father at Wujal Wujal.⁴³ The lyrics express the beauty of the rainforest where it meets the sea and reef. In their song 'Beautiful Land and Sea' Dylan and Damien Harrigan capture the connections of their mother's and father's countries at Wujal Wujal and Hopevale on the Cape York. They use Guugu Yimithirr words and refer to local geographical spots in their texts whilst using a variety of musical styles ranging from reggae, blues, Country and Western and pop. No songs on the album refer to their Christian heritage however.

42 See, for example Breen 1989; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004; Walker 2000.

43 The Black Image Band 2007.

During regular Sunday church worship between 2004–2005, no references were made to Indigenous forms of spirituality either, despite Pastor George Rosendale's best efforts to introduce these in the 1980s. A uniquely Hopevalian Christian spirituality linked to geography, the local language and people outside of church still existed, however. In conversation with community members I discovered, for example, that hymns 'touched the hearts' of people because the hymns reminded the listeners and singers of 'the old people' or ancestors. They remembered who had loved particular songs or sung them on particular occasions at particular places. References to hymns in connection with place and person were also found elsewhere, church obituaries being one example of this:

On Sunday the 23rd of January Walter was up early, moving around, doing his own thing. Ella, his wife started singing: 'I am coming Lord' and surprisingly, he joined in and the two sang the hymn, followed by a few more. They then sat and watched the beach, with Walter describing each bird, and naming them in language.⁴⁴

Here again, references to hymn-singing are being made in the same text which describes the Indigenous practice of naming or listing flora and fauna. Despite the lack of newly, locally-composed hymnody in the community, hymns are still associated with Country and are able to elicit an emotional response from Hopevalians linking their Country to their Lutheran spirituality.⁴⁵

I suspect that, with the Lutheran Church of Australia becoming less conservative in recent years, opening up debates on Indigenous theologies it is likely that Hopevalian musicians will follow suit and begin composing songs in English and Guugu Yimithirr referring to Country, a Christian spirituality and the shared contemporary social history of their ancestors and community. I argue here that this is a form of re-Indigenisation and re-sacralisation as during the evacuation, hymnody became inextricably linked to Country and ancestors. Aspects of Indigenisation and re-sacralisation in song include references to local geographical areas and Country, 'the old people' or ancestors, local history *alongside* references to Christian hymnody, and worship. Whilst the songs therefore are not based on pre-contact musical styles, I suggest that it is likely that the re-Indigenisation is taking place on a different platform, where the community's shared, more contemporary, post-contact social history is helping shape the significance of their Christian identities and their secular as well as sacred relationships to Country. This is already happening outside of the church environment in Hopevale by devout elder Willie Gordon who describes his relationship to Country and his spirituality in the co-authored publication *Guurbi: My Special Place*.⁴⁶

44 Obituary Walter Bowen, January 2005.

45 See also Swijghuisen Reigersberg, in press.

46 Gordon and Bennett 2007.

Conclusion: Why are these changes significant?

The musical changes described above are important because they may be one way in which Hopevalians could come to reconcile their localised mission history with their modern identities as Aboriginal Christians. These processes of reconciliation and healing in many Aboriginal communities, Hopevale included, are still on-going.

Pastor Rosendale's Carols by Candlelight speech refers to the social problems which especially the younger generation of Hopevalians are experiencing. Young men in particular, suffer from high levels of substance overuse, usually alcohol and hydroponic *gunja* (cannabis) and some petrol sniffing. Many have been incarcerated and others have committed suicide. Domestic violence and child abuse are not uncommon and in many instances have become normalised, although not accepted.

In an interview Pastor Rosendale commented that:

GR: But, what I am trying to do is to, to revive some of this [land-based spirituality] for the theologians to look at, but some of them came up ... guns ... after all that condemnation they put me through ... now they looking at how can they improve Christianity among the Aborigines. I told them at the time, I said: 'The horse has spoken. Now they are in your paddock' ... and I said: 'In your paddock you got alcohol, you got drugs ... and whatever. Do you prefer that?' ... You'll find it hard, you ... they [people in Hopevale] are between this ... and this ... 'These people here [in Hopevale], they ... I believe they are too white orientated. And, which is sad, because it's taken away from them, that which really speaks to them. And ... the message, message would be more meaningful to them they were ... but they in between here and there.⁴⁷

As Koen and others have recently demonstrated in their text on Medical Ethnomusicology⁴⁸ music can have a profound effect on improving wellbeing. I argue here, that the re-Indigenisation and sacralisation of Hopevalian popular music may be a way in which Hopevalians will be able to create and nurture an identity which is uniquely theirs. The re-sacralisation of Country through music and the acceptance of the community's Lutheran heritage, will allow for the reconciliation of a modern, Indigenous identity which has its spiritual base in concepts of Country and allows for the transmission of local, post-contact oral histories through song. The answer may not solely lie in the increased use of the Indigenous language, as Pastor George suggested in his Carols by Candlelight speech. It may include the more regular use of locally composed music in church, which reflects the local Hopevalian Lutheran spirituality. Whilst the performance of newly composed materials in church was still relatively rare between 2004 and 2005, I observed in 2009 that the use of the local language was on the rise, and that people were re-introducing Indigenous dancing styles and

⁴⁷ Rosendale, George interview with Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 23 March 2005, Hopevale.

⁴⁸ Koen et al 2008.

painting into the community, some incorporating the community's Lutheran heritage. This to me was evidence that local Indigenous people are striving to reconcile their mission history with their Indigenous heritage. Whilst in the past they were denied access to their Indigenous heritage, today they are working towards incorporating their Christian beliefs with their pre-colonial heritage. It is my hope that the trend described above will continue so that, next time I visit, my Indigenous friends will say: 'We are Lutherans from *Hopevale*, welcome to our Country.'

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